

Workshop's relocation irks mental health advocates

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Mental health advocates once described a new center for the retarded on the grounds of the former Willowbrook state institution as a bright star rising from the darkness.

Now they worry the uncompleted Elizabeth A. Connelly Community Resource Center will become a fallen star. The center's first tenant is a workshop for the retarded that is leaving an urban setting — and those same advocates charge this relocation betrays a hard-won policy of letting the retarded live and work in the midst of the community.

"I see that emotionally and pro-

fessionally as a step backward," said Dr. Gerald Spielman, a member of the Staten Island Retardation and Disabilities Council, an advocacy group. His remark drew applause at the council's annual luncheon Friday.

These concerns "disappoint" the assemblywoman for whom the center is named, the legislator who has championed the rights of the retarded for the past 13 years. Mrs. Connelly and the site's state administrator said that after years of reform, advocates should see the old grounds as part of the community instead of the isolated place where the retarded were hidden and mistreated.

"It isn't Willowbrook anymore,"

she said. "There are no bars, there are no walls. It is an open facility."

Both sides tout the center as an opportunity to showcase enlightened care for the retarded. Differences lie in how to achieve that vision.

The advocates want the complex of nine buildings left from the old institution to host programs not now available to the retarded and their families. They would like a therapeutic pool, gymnasium, information exchange, speciality music, dance, and art classes and support services.

Mrs. Connelly said she agrees, (See WORKSHOP, Page A 14)